Rome's Dire Straits: Claustrophobic seas and *imperium sine fundo*

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I.

As many have recognized, the ways in which Rome is seen to achieve domination over bodies of water, exploited as culturally and religiously charged *limina* in actual and imagined maps of empire, is key to the tuning of imperial identities in Latin literature.[1] *Possessio maris,* and the act of crossing, bridging, rerouting or halting the flow of rivers, become familiar figures for empire's militaristic, space-invading might, and for what is envisaged as either the morally suspect or scientifically exciting advance of imperial knowledge and technology.[2] Yet seas and large rivers – concealing vast underworlds – also yield uncertain, ungraspable knowledge and are frequently sites of epistemological crisis. Thus the Nile refuses to reveal all its secrets (cf. Lucan 10.285-7), while only by the unnatural act of pinning down the seer Proteus by force will the god be made to yield didactic *praecepta* in *Georgics* 4.398. Likewise Thetis, daughter of Nereus, whom Peleus succeeds in penetrating and 'filling up' (*inplet,* Ov.*Met*.11.265) only when he takes Proteus' advice and binds her in snares and ropes (*Met*.11.252), is impossible to know, or rather, can only be 'known' by being violently possessed in the act of rape. Indeed, early imperial texts arguably fixate less on the stretching of great oceans at the natural borders of endless empire, or on control over *mare nostrum*, than on a series of narrow, infamous, well-trafficked straits which even if (momentarily) yoked continue to churn up irresolution, paradox and obsessive longing. These perilous maritime paths - in particular the Hellespont at one end of the sea of Marmara, the Bosporus at the other, with its mythical clashing rocks, are over-determined mythic-historical borders imagined as turbulent furrows for endlessly innovative yet increasingly cramped creative production. Latin literature returns us to these slim, fervent bodies of water again and again, making them crucial figures for first century re-imaginings of empire's contested limits, for the aporetic structures of imperialistic desire, and for the violent, witty Romanization of Alexandrian poetics in the context of expanding, densifying empire.

[1] See e.g. Herodotus 7.33-7, Virg.*G*.1.29-30, *Aen*.8.726-8, Augustus *RG* 26, Sen.*Apoc*.12.3.17-18, Lucan 1.110, 1.369-70, 2.570-1, 2.588-9, with Braund (1996), Taylor (2009) and Campbell (2012).
[2] See Taylor (2009) on the 'special' or 'secret' knowledge to be gained (or not) from seas and rivers.

The notoriously dangerous Hellespont, which literally and symbolically separates Europe from Asia on either side of the Black Sea, with Troy positioned on its South-West bank, is an especially over-loaded site and delineator of conflict.[3] Like all straits, it is in theory a sea, but its narrowness makes it more akin to a river or path, and allows it to function as a border, intimidating obstacle, and marker or measure of transgression. Priapus, worshipped at Lampsacus on the eastern side of the Hellespont, is often referred to in Latin texts as *hellespontiacus*, and the paradoxical nature of this god – guardian of boundaries but also patron saint of obscene, rambunctious poetry[4] – makes him the perfect ward for the strait itself, a challenging, deceptively attenuated barrier that just asks to be traversed, to the extent that it seems to incite erotic tension.[5] Famously, it is the liquid wall separating Leander from Hero yet also joining the lovers in rapturous union, a death trap that promises to document the masculine agency of Leander's love while also threatening to wash it away. Leander's crossing and recrossing of the Hellespont, as he swims against the current of previous attempts (not least that of Phrixus and Helle, whose name was 'stolen' by the strait when she drowned, and Propertius' Cynthia, shipwrecked and sinking 'like Helle' at 2.26a.5-6) comes to chart the narrative pull of this unique space as it thickens and clogs with a miscellany of plotlines.[6] The Ovidian Hellespont is both familiar (Hero calls it an *adsuetum iter,* Ov.*Her.*19.149) and alien; so narrow Hero and Leander can 'almost touch hands across it' (*Her*.18.179-80), yet as hazardous as the wildest of oceans; it has the power to both prove and sink *possessio maris,* regardless of how often it has been navigated, and is an unreliable, risky, Protean stream of inspiration.

In what follows, I will dip in and out of passages from Catullus 64, Ovid's *Heroides* and *Tristia*, Lucan's *Bellum Civile* and Statius' *Achilleid* and *Silvae,* as I trace ways back and for, down and through the Hellespont (alongside other similar straits) in Latin literature. This space becomes a laboratory for the ways in which poetic/military intensity is amplified in imperial texts via restriction, contraction and

[3] See esp. Herodotus 7.33-7, 9.118-122. For a historical overview see Rubel (2009). Xerxes' famous bridging of the strait is echoed in the many mentions of Hellespont crossings which pepper books 31-38 of Livy's history, and comes to exemplify hubristic, autocratic arrogance. See e.g. Sall.*Cat.*13, Lucretius 2-1029-33. Prop.2.11.22, Juv.10.173-5, Caesar *BG* 4.17.1, Sen.*Brev*.18.5.

[4] Priapus is named *hellespontiacus* at Virg.*G*.4.111, Ov.*Fasti* 1.440, Petron.139.2.v.8; cf *deus Hellesponti* (*Fasti* 6.341),

[5] Cf. Feeney (2004) 101 on the Hellespont as both 'barrier and access'.

[6] See Rimell (2006) 180-204.

pressure rather than via expatiation: it sharpens the edges of empire's 'logic of expansive becoming', as well as lending it three dimensions.[7] However I want here to go beyond recent critical appraisals of straits on either side of the Black Sea as simply representing an 'overcrowded literary tradition',[8] and to probe in detail how and why Roman poets convert the well-worn track of the prologue to Callimachus' *Aitia* (an almost fetishized metaphor in Augustan literature especially) into the rapid, clogged depths of the Hellespont, which itself evokes the massive, filthy Euphrates at the Roman empire's longest lasting Eastern frontier in Callimachus' *Hymn to Apollo*,[9] in contrast to the pure, trickling stream implicitly identified with small-scale, involuted poetics (108-12, cf. *Epig.*28).[10] Why transform solid into liquid, two dimensions into three? Why privilege this 'soft', uneven border – the most unreliable of monuments, liable to drown (out) and transfigure every material manifestation of human passage or cultural history – as a site for imperial space claiming? And what is at stake in the Roman literary emphasis on plunging into and filling up the 'deep' Hellespont[11] (Domitian trumps Xerxes, Statius suggests, in his virtual capacity to turn the strait into a solid road[12]) or in imagining it seething under pressure, rather than on bridging the water in a feat of superhuman, nature-suppressing engineering?

II.

In *Heroides* 18-19, where Leander must swim (and Hero must imagine him swimming) from Abydos to Sestos and back again, Ovid's vocabulary of repetition is compulsive, building up to what Alessandro Barchiesi recognizes as 'one of the closest Latin translations of the *Aitia* prologue'.[13] Whereas Callimachus' Apollo instructs the poet to 'tread a path which carriages do not trample' and not to drive his chariot 'upon the common tracks of others, nor along a wide road, but on unworn

[7] Coward (2005) 865, Rimell (2015) *passim.*
[8] Feeney (2004, 88, 101-4), Newlands (2013, 64, 70-71).
[9] Cf. Barchiesi (2001) 50-55 on the river-narrator Achelous in Ovid *Met.*8 ('it is hard to overstate the importance of this symbol of tumidity in Roman poetry' 52). Also Newlands (2002) 301-9 on Volturnus in Statius *Silv*.4.3.
[10] Cf. F.Williams (1978) 89, G.Williams (1994) 73-4. See Thomas (1993) and Hunter (2006) 1-6 *et passim* on the phenomenon whereby Latin poets from the late Republican period onwards (and the Augustans especially) allude with remarkable frequency 'to a small number of "programmatic" passages in Callimachus', effectively producing a (distorted) Callimachus for modern criticism. Cf. Cameron (1995) 454-83.
[11] Ennius *Ann.* fr.369 Skutsch (Varro *LL* 7.21): *nam ut Ennius ait 'isque Hellesponto pontem contendit in alto'.* Cf. Herodotus 7.36.3, Florus 1.24.2.
[12] Statius *Silv*.4.3.55-7.
[13] Barchiesi (1996).

paths (*κελεύθους ἀτρίπτο]υς*)', although the course is 'more narrow' (*στεινοτέρην*), Ovid's Leander confesses: 'Already my accustomed path through the waters is well trod (*attritus*), like the road pressed by many a wheel.' (*Her.*18.133-4). Ovid's *attritus* calques and opposes Callimachus' *ἀτρίπτο]υς,* while for Leander (and his fellow poet) the narrowness of the path (cf. *tam brevis…aqua, Her.*18.174) partners – counterintuitively - its familiarity and retraceability. After extending elegy beyond its limits before the swollen river of *Amores* 3.6, as it interacts with *Amores* 2.19.31-2 ('Whoever wants what is permitted and easy, let him pluck boughs from a tree, and drink from a great river'), [14] Ovid now dives into a strait that maximizes his well-worked oxymoron of the poetic *iter* endlessly rehearsed but never – in this new, metamorphic element – the same river twice. Dense with conflicting stories and emotions, the waves and weeds that pull Leander down, the Hellespont can enact conflicting moods, genres, and sound effects – now calm and lulling (18.19, 23), now roaring with *fluctibus immodicis* (18.26, 137). There could be no more fertile space in which to revel in Ovid's maturation of the (so-constructed) aporia of imperial Callimacheanism. The sheer intensity produced by packing the turbulent, muddy epic river into a slender, quasi-elegiac enclosure gives rise to an entirely different, 'unsettlingly other'[15] poetic energy which will course and mutate through much of what survives of post-Augustan Latin poetry, and which is not adequately summed up (as so many critics have stated or implied) as a confounding of expectations, a mitigation or postponement of bellicose epic, an ironic confirmation of Alexandrian principles or simply as an abstract code for contextualizing Roman poetry in and alongside the Greek tradition.[16]

Ovid narrates his own journey down the Hellespont into exile in *Tristia* 1.10. In a passage layered with bifurcations and tergiversations, the poet is seen to retrace in reverse Aeneas' journey west to Italy from just inside the Hellespont, as well as the Argo's journey west from Colchis (not to mention the path of the *phaselus* in Catullus 4 west from the Black Sea). He describes leaving his first ship at the Greek island of

[14] On Callimachean metaphors in *Amores* 2.19 and 3.6, see Lateiner (1978), Suter (1989), cf. Barchiesi (2001) 54-5.
[15] Hunter (2007) 1.
[16] See especially Helzle (1988) 75-6, and (1989) 12: 'Ovid may…present himself as un-Callimachean on the surface, but at the same time also as more Callimachean than Callimachus', cf. G.Williams (1994) 73; Newlands (2002) esp. 284-325 on Domitian's/Statius' road as 'both adroitly Callimachean and epicizing [i.e. 'anti-Callimachean']'; McNelis (2007) *passim* e.g. 20 ('Statius' allusions to Callimachus thus help to situate his epic in the literary tradition'), after Thomas (1983) 201-2, Conte (1986) 92. Also see Clauss (review of Hunter 2007), cf. Cameron (1995) 454-83.

Samothrace in the Aegean sea just before the entrance to the Hellespont. That ship then continues with Ovid's luggage to Tomis on the West coast of the Black Sea while the poet takes another ship bound for Tempyra, near the Thracian coast, before crossing by land to Tomis. His path is 'double' twice over, a version of the now familiar Ovidian *lusus* continually propelled by the undular doubleness of the elegiac couplet itself: it involves two boats, two different ways of travelling; it redoubles in reverse the epic voyages of Jason and Aeneas, and the destination itself is situated on a 'double sea' (1.10.32). The ship 'drew down' the poet to the Hellespont (*Aeoliae mare me deduxit in Helles,* 15), evoking another metapoetic image much experimented with in Roman responses to Callimachus' *Aitia* prologue, not least by Ovid himself – that of 'spinning down' wool (or by extension refined poetry) to make it finer and more elegant, *λεπτός* or *λεπτἄλέος* (*Aitia* fr.1.24).[17] This hexameter introduces the pentameter's oxymoronic image– a homage to *ad mea perpetuum deducite tempora carmen* at *Metamorphoses* 1.4 – of the Hellespont as a 'long path' cleaved by a 'slender furrow' (*et longum tenui limite fecit iter,* 1.10.16, where the spondaic *longum* is pushed up close against the speedier, elegiac *tenui*). At the very centre of the poem, *relegit* ('retraces', v.24)[18] makes emphatic the contrast between the two arcs of the poet's journey. Ovid himself prefers to take the neo-Callimachean path less travelled, on (sprightly, poetic) foot (*pede*, v.23), while his faithful ship revisits the long ancient strait (the neoteric sounding *Hellespontiacas* taking up half a pentameter, at v.25). Crossing and sailing down these waters has, through the magnifying lens of the *Heroides*, become synonymous with rereading. Yet return achieves an effect of accumulation and encompassment, so that elegiac doubleness is itself set up to trope an ambitious buy-out of the entire Callimachean imaginary - both land and sea, both unknown trail and trampled thoroughfare, the one and the other – as the couplet's symmetry expands to reach new horizons:[19]

vos facite ut ventos, loca cum diversa petamus,
illa suos habeat, nec minus *illa* suos.

[17] The *loci classici* for *deduco* evoking this meaning are Horace *C*.3.30.13-14, Virgil *Ecl*.6.5, *G*.3.11, Ovid *Met*.1.4. See Servius *ad Ecl*.6.5, with Barchiesi (2005) 145, (2001) 52.
[18] Relegit *Bodleianus B.N. Rawl.107* is accepted unanimously by modern editors, resolving the manuscripts' non-sensical reliquit.
[19] Cf. Conte (1989) envisages Ovid's experiment with the Roman elegiac code as an 'escape' from the 'enclosure' and partiality of the elegiac world. I am suggesting what is in a sense an opposing movement, the encompassment of 'outside elegy', or the expansion of elegy to the edges of empire.

*Tr.*1.10.49-50

> Make the winds favour the one and no less the other, though we seek different places.

Ovid continues to tread the Hellespont in book three of the *Tristia.* In *Tr.*3.10, as he bemoans the harshness of Tomis, he reports that the Hister, as wide as (or 'not less narrow' than, *nec angustior*, v.26) the Nile, is now completely frozen, and functions as its own bridge. Already the comparison with the distant Nile, river of all rivers,[20] evokes Virgil's (and Augustus') quasi-Pharaonic discourse of limitless conquest (remember *Aeneid* 6.800, where the mouths of the sevenfold Nile tremble under imperial rule), while the unusual adjective *papyrifero* (27) connects these lines, through Virgil, with *Metamorphoses* 15.753-4 (it is a greater thing for Caesar to have 'led his victorious fleet up the seven-mouthed stream of the papyrus-bearing Nile'). Yet now the dream of absolute mastery, the conversion of mighty, liquid river into solid ground, a regime without borders to divide peoples and 'repel wars' (8), is in reality a nightmare scenario; the wine drunk in the name of Bacchus the loosener to celebrate Augustan conquest (in Horace's *Odes* 1.37, for example) is now frozen into icy, self-confining shards. What's more, if *possessio maris* (as in Irigaray's classic analysis of Nietzsche) synthesizes all need for mastery – that is, the need to overcome fear of the fluid and metamorphic which so disturb masculinist, sovereign ontology – then the freezing of the Hister makes drama of the notion that this mastery is ever incomplete.[21] Firm ground may have been created of this river, even a glassy roof that makes a mirror for self-identity from a now perfectly level *aequor*;[22] yet beneath the surface, the dark water still snakes (*serpit,* 30) to the sea, and the view in the mirror is terrifying. Ennius' 'deep' narrow Hellespont at once offers the key analogy, in lines 41-2: where ships once sailed, men go on foot, and had Leander had to cross this sea, his death would not have been the fault of the 'narrow water' (*angustae…aquae,* 42).

Like the silted up, solidifying well of inspiration which congests Ovid's *pectora* but allows him to spurt a (muddy?) thin stream in *Ex Ponto* 4.2, this frozen, many-mouthed sea of a river is a hyperbolic version of the thickened Hellespont, and

[20] Cf. Diod.Sic.1.12.5-6.
[21] Irigaray (1991).
[22] Cf. Irigaray (1985) 237 ('Every body of water becomes a mirror, every sea, ice').

of Xerxes' strait covered with a wooden 'roof'. Here Ovid shows that agglutination is not simply an ironic distraction from the ὀλίγη λιβὰς that will finally emerge, in any case.[23] Taken to its extreme, it produces radical and miraculous art forms to rival the Hellenistic papyri manufactured on the banks of the (unknowable, surreally flooding) Nile and conserved in the libraries of Alexandria: an enormous epic sculpture in which frost-glazed ships are set into a marble block (47); the proto-Petronian centrepiece of frozen, encased, yet still live fish (49-50), and – in a flash-forward to Martial's photographic stills in a flooded arena – dolphins caught mid-air by the extreme cold as they attempt to leap through the waves (43-4).[24] Yet this experimental art is contingent, we note, on the uncanny incompleteness even of 'total' freezing - the preservation of unkillable movement in or despite paralysis. As winter's cruel imprisonment forces elegy to explode outwards, (even epistolary) art becomes sculptural, visual, spectacular, and the resulting multi-media installations produce eerie tinkling sounds around gaping barbarian mouths (*saepe sonant moti glacie pendente capilli,* 21).

III.

Fast-forward to the 90s, and Statius selects the Hellespont as the channel from which to launch his second epic, the *Achilleid*. The first lines of book 1, after the proem, zoom in on Paris returning to Troy via the Hellespont, with stolen Helen on board. The verb *relegebat* in v.23 (another reason, incidentally, to appreciate the force of the apparent conjecture *relegit* at *Tr*.1.10.24) signals to readers that we are also retracing an increasingly unmanageable cartography of narratives contained within the ever-fluctuating Hellespont.[25] The strait – also the feverish fault line of war at 1.409-10 - now brims with desire and guilt, a *culpatum iter* (Helen herself evokes memories of previous abducted women, from Io to Medea), as well as with hatred, resentment, fear. The phrase *fervent coeuntia Phrixi / litora* ('The narrowing shores of Phrixus swarm' 28-9, cf. *fervet amor belli,* 412; *fervent portus*, 443) imports the buzz of Trojan ships preparing to leave Carthage, as desperate Dido looks on (*litora fervere late / prospiceres, Aen.*4.409-50); Thetis too spies a Trojan ship, and fears being

[23] See G.Williams (1994) 73-77, who argues rightly that we should not misread this image in *Ex P*.4.2 as an admission of poetic inferiority ('Ovid's claim…that his flow of poetic inspiration is reduced to a mere trickle can be seen to work against his pose of decline. His initial insistence on the "clogging up" of his *pectora* turns into a carefully contrived statement of allegiance to Callimachean poetics' 74).
[24] Cf. Martial *de Spectaculis* 13(11), depicting a bear captured in birdlime mid 'flight'.
[25] This is also discussed by Feeney (2004) 88, 101-4.

abandoned by Achilles, who often appears to be the object of her quasi-erotic desire.[26] Helle is here, implicitly, in both versions of her myth – dead and buried (*condita*) in the waters, and entombed alive (like Ovid's fishes), to be reborn as a Nereid. In v.26 Thetis broods and panics beneath crystal waters, as if they have a lid – a line highly reminiscent, once we begin treading the Hellespont, of the Danube with its mirror-flat roof of ice in *Tristia* 3.10. Thetis' claustrophobia already forecasts her ultimate impotence in this text, in contrast to her unstoppable son. In a move typical of the *Achilleid*, Statius weights readerly knowledge of the epic tradition with Thetis' acute psychic pain as she implicitly recalls the moment Peleus, from aboard the Argo, resolved to rape her at the beginning of Catullus 64,[27] and as she anticipates the violence and vulnerability of Achilles' soft, not quite immortal body in the text's present: the Hellespont throbs not just with stories but with their concertinaed spatio-temporal coordinates.[28] When the goddess jumps out of the water with her troop of Nereids, and enjambment between lines 27 and 28 has us wait momentarily for that dramatic opening leap, we perceive something of an Ovidian, cinematic still as we pause at the caesura after *thalamis* (28). And yet, after the escape, there is suffocation: the strait has become so thronging, so narrow, that it has no room for its own creatures, let alone the proto-epic ships and library of stories it must accommodate (*litora et angustum dominas non explicat aequor*, 29).

The verb *non explicat* here is usually translated as 'does not have space for' (as in 'cannot spread out'[29]) but it also hints at the difficulty of (spatially, intellectually) untangling or unrolling the book-roll containing all the female characters that the sea conjoins in this scene: Thetis, Helle, Dido, Hero, Hecuba, Helen (plus Io, Europa, Medea, as well as Propertius' Cynthia).[30] This is a text which makes the drama of Thetis' somatized panic inseparable from readers' experience of the poem's intertextual pressure, and presents Thetis' Protean all-knowingness as a puzzle we will never see untangled: while Proteus *novit…omnia* (*Georgics* 4.392), the goddess appears to misremember myth, or to remember undocumented versions of

[26] E.g. *Ach*.1.229-30, where Thetis abducts Achilles from the cave while he sleeps, recalling the moment Peleus attempted to rape Thetis in her cave by pouncing on her as she slept, cf. Ov.*Met.*11.238-9 (and compare *occupat* at *Met*.11.239 with *occupat* at *Ach*.1.318); also see *Ach*.1.330-34, where Thetis is a Pygmalion figure fashioning her ideal female Achilles.
[27] Catull.64.16-19. Cf. Lauletta (1993), Newlands (2013), 64.
[28] Cf. Henderson (1998) on Lucan's 'abuse' of linear narration.
[29] OLD *explico* sv.4.
[30] OLD *explico* sv.1b (to unfold a book roll), 7 (to make clear to understanding).

familiar myths. Yet in the end she is the only figure to know those 'other things' about Achilles' life that we now long for her to divulge but will never hear (*scit cetera mater*, *Ach*.2.167).[31] Stories swirling and entwining around each others in seas associated with mysterious, interblurring femininity and the ungovernability of male desire for women produce complex patterns, fading echoes, and a poetry that is challenging to write about, even to follow (and much less to categorize in the Greco-Roman epic tradition). This programmatic passage already shows us that narrowing and confinement will not so much return us to Callimachean principles as force the bursting out of a newly intensified, 'choked' epic voice: this is what the *Achilleid* delivers, even (especially) in its truncated, just over one-book form.

The movement to crowd out the width and depths of the Hellespont in three dimensions, to represent it as thickened to the point of overflow or eruption, perversely extends the Homeric image of the Xanthus slowed by victims of the Trojan war as Achilles enjoys his *aristeia*, and its reception in Latin texts. In Catullus 64, which is woven into Statius' *Achilleid* from the start,[32] Achilles' greatness is summed up as his success in saturating first the Xanthus with Trojan corpses, then consequently even the Hellespont, perversely altering not just these waterways' momentum, but even their temperature.[33] The scene draws on *Iliad* 21.17ff., but in Catullus' miniaturizing poem the development of Homer's viewpoint involves widening our gaze so that it can fix instead on the painful constriction at the point at which the river meets the sea. Where there should be dilution and release, there is only the continued mixing of blood as bloating bodies wrestle each other in 'deep streams' no longer capable of diffusing the warmth of human flesh that suggests both recent death and decomposition:

> testis erit magnis virtutibus unda Scamandri,
> quae passim rapido diffunditur Hellesponto,
> cuius iter caesis angustans corporum acervis
> alta tepefaciet permixta flumina caede.
>
> Catullus 64.357-360

[31] Cf. Rimell (2015) 252-270, esp.262-3, with Heslin (2005) 136. .
[32] Cf. Lauletta (1993), Newlands (2013, 70): note discussion in both of *Ach.*1.956-7's evocation of Catull.64.59 (*irrita ventosae linquens promissa procellae*).
[33] The intensity created by body heat and the passion for war (cf. *Aen*.12.35-6, *recalent nostro Tiberina fleunta / sanguine*) is in part what makes Ovid's clogged, ice-cold Hister original in *Tr*.3.10.

> The wave of Scamander shall witness his great deeds of valour, the wave that pours itself out into fast-moving Hellespont, whose narrow channel he will choke with heaped up corpses, and heat the deep streams with blended blood.

Achilles' slaughter fills a larger, though still narrow, and narrowing, channel, taking us back to the beginning of the poem, where we see the Argo with Peleus on board sailing down the waters of the river Phasis, just before he meets Thetis in the churned up waves. The passage also evokes the central ekphrasis of Peleus and Thetis' wedding quilt, depicting bodies trapped in the terrifying corridors of the labyrinth. Despite being an archetypical epic synthesis of war's brutality, the scene at vv.357-60 perfectly conveys the aesthetic of the Hellenistic epyllion as it condenses intricate human detail into a tiny canvas: *haec vestis priscis hominum variata figuris* (v.50). Catullus shows how this refashioning of *grandis* as *tenuis* is not just artistically intricate and delicate, but also creates its own turbo-charged epic vigor: *variatio* can be horrifying, and is even what war does, as it works to mix its own unique cocktail of gore.

IV.

Beneath the polished surface of Statius' *Theteid* snakes Lucan's *Bellum Civile*, an 'intensely geographical' poem [34] whose world-view develops around bulging-receding, actual and metaphorical rivers and straits.[35] These bodies of water are coordinates in a 'global' yet ultimately limited and empire-limiting war that catalyzes – in Lucan's vision - unprecedented evolution of the principle of merging, heaping, overfilling and pressuring that has been so effectively visualized in the narrow-deep Hellespont.[36] They are also symbolic trenches for Lucan's radical rechannelling of Lucretius' *de Rerum Natura*: a significant consequence of this and previous Roman civil wars, thunderously re-imagined in the *Bellum Civile* in terms of Lucretian apocalypse (cf. *DRN* 5.95-109), is that empire is seen to reach the limits both of

[34] I quote Pogorzelski (2011, 143), cf. Masters (1992) 150-78, Rossi (2000), (1998), Bexley (2014).
[35] On rivers in Lucan see especially Masters (1992) 169-72,Walde (2007), Bexley (2014).
[36] Crucial here is Henderson (1998) which heaps up and documents the heaping up of Lucan's imagery and poetics of implosion, straining, compression, concussion. Cf. Masters (1992) 65-70, 145-6.

knowledge-acquisition through conquest and of the (ethically pure) lure to know.[37] The most monstrous violence (such that pollutes rivers with mashed bodies, creates new rivers of blood over land, and even melts men into streams of viscera[38]) defies rational knowing, Lucan implies, and can only swell before our eyes even as we look away. When the poet himself shuns the role of didactic *Praeceptor* in book 1, he associates this unenlightenment with the strangeness of oceans: as Caesar summons troops from Gaul, the narrator pauses to ask about the tides on the Belgian coast, but does not answer his own questions, leaving them to 'those who study the workings of the universe' (1.417), and willing the causes to remain hidden (1.419).[39] Yet the poem's premature frustration of Caesar's imperialistic *noscendi Nilum…cupido* (10.268) is itself bound to be complicit, Lucan suggests, in the suicidal, imploding impact of civil war itself as it corrodes the certainty of Roman identity in dark interiors, an idea captured and 'foreseen' in the unspeakable *nefas* of sacrificed animals' sickly innards in 1.616-634. Like the tormented seer Arruns, the failed *vates* of civil war must sing of the past-as-future in winding, ambiguous streams which (cannot) hide the horror of Pompey's - and Rome's - fate (1.638, 2.735).

As several scholars have recently pointed out, the geography of the second half of the *Bellum Civile* sees the initial optimism of the Neronian vision of empire in the poem's opening passages threatened with collapse: civil war not only delayed the imminent 'completion' of Roman empire under Neronian *pax* (1.13-20), but derailed it permanently (cf. 7.426-36), producing the still-menacing vision of an 'outside Rome' beyond reach, of a Europe dwarfed by Asia (9.416-17), and of an empire increasingly conscious - in a perverse miming as well as undoing of Caesar's own psychology – of its own narrow(ed) limits.[40] The Hellespont and related straits are again crucial icons for this spatial upheaval and for an evolving Roman geographical imagination in the mid-first century CE. Before unleashing civil war's mass geographical-physiological 'loosening', led by boundary-smashing Caesar, Lucan envisages the tiny sliver of time (*temporis angusti*, 1.108) during which the two combatants were kept apart by Crassus, who functioned as the photographic negative

[37] For discussion of Lucretius' influence on Lucan, on which much remains to be written, see Esposito (1996), Hardie (2006), (2009) esp. 249-54.
[38] *BC* 9.809-14.
[39] Cf. Hardie (2009) 251. Compare also *BC* 10.285-7 on uncertain knowledge of the Nile.
[40] Especially Pogorzelski (2011), who discusses in detail *BC*.7.419-36, 8.208-238, 8.335-9, 9.411-20, 10.39-52 in the context of Nero's latest and planned campaigns to expand empire. See also Bexley (2009) and (2014), which extends many of the points made by Pogorzelski.

of the Hellespont separating two significant, opposing land masses – that is, as the poetically slender (*gracilis*, 101) Isthmus of Corinth, which separates the Ionian and Aegean seas and prevents them dashing together (101-3). Crassus' obstructing body (more specifically, *ἰσθμός* = 'neck') was soon breached/cut, an astute geographical encryption of Pompey's beheading in *BC* 8.667-674 (where *secat* in v.672 matches and avenges *secat* at 1.101). Statius, incidentally, will propose this pairing at *Silv.*4.3.56-60 and *Ach.*1.407-10, while Ovid used first the Isthmus, then the Hellespont, to sketch thin dividing lines in the perpetual flow of his epic *Metamorphoses,* at 6.419-23 and 11.194-6.[41] Yet as Lucan was penning his *Bellum Civile*, Nero was reputedly attempting to pull off the feat of carving a canal through the actual Isthmus of Corinth, to save boats from sailing all the way round the Peloponnese. Like his many predecessors, including Caligula and - more to the point - Julius Caesar himself,[42] Nero eventually failed (Lucian, *Nero* 2, cf. Pliny *NH* 4.10). In *Silvae* 4.3, Statius is confident that Domitian would have easily 'made Ino's puny Isthmus mingle the seas' (*Silv*.4.3.59-60), yet this too proves to be wishful thinking.[43] Obliquely, then, Lucan's human geography taints Nero's engineering ambitions with the hubris of civil war, and implicitly with Caesarian *cupido,* while also previewing how overreaching Caesar's capacity to impose his will on space (and also, by shortening distances, on time) shall eventually *not* be *sine fine*.

Conversely, as Pompey sets up base at Capua in book 2, aiming to meet the enemy at the foot of Apennines, from which mighty rivers are born (from the Po to the Tiber), we are given a satellite's view of the whole of Italy and its many veins which ends in an entirely vanquished, sunken Isthmus: now the mountain range running down Italy's spine is barred by the waters of Scylla (the straits of Messina), but previously an isthmus joined Italy to Sicily, before it was crushed by the two seas – not the Aegean and Ionian this time, but the Tyrrhenian and Ionian (2.435-8).[44] Crassus-as-Isthmus is about to be overwhelmed by the pressure of Rome's two

[41] On the geographical markers announcing transition between gods and heroes, and heroes and history in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, see Barchiesi (1997) 183. The Isthmus of Corinth and the Hellespont are linked symbolically by Ino, the stepmother of Helle and Phrixus, whose cult was celebrated at Lechaeum on the Isthmus.

[42] Suetonius *Div.Iul.*44.3 (*perfodere Isthmum*), *Calig.*21, *Nero* 19, 37.3.

[43] See Coleman (1988) *ad loc.* By the end of the first century, at least (cf. Quintilian 3.8.16), the feasibility of such a project is cited as a rhetorical staple, one of the *quaestiones* frequently raised in *suasoriae.*

[44] On the separation of Sicily from Italy, see Virg.*Aen*.3.414-19, Sallust *Histories* 4.fr.26 Maurenbrecher = Servius on *Aen*.3.414, and Ov.*Met*.14.6-7, 15.290-2, with Fantham (1992) 164.

tsunami generals, who will radically reconfigure Italian psychogeography, creating great splits and tears that are themselves reminiscent of the wrenching of Sicily from the Italian mainland. Yet Italy itself, it is hinted here, is but an outsize isthmus, a long, slender land mass encroached upon by another pair of seas (2.399-400). As we take in this poetic map, Pompey's position at the foot of the Apennines looks to be already precarious, the (distant, yet metaphorically not so distant) threat of pressing seas and exaggeratedly large rivers (the Po is bigger than the Nile and the Danube, 2.416, 418) looming on all sides, and already predicting surrender.

War in the *Bellum Civile* is itself an oceanic force which will enforce disturbing fusions and leave Rome shipwrecked (4.87) or submerged in an uncannily calm sea (1.260-1), creating new yet rapidly putrefying 'hills' with the bodies of its victims (7.790). At the beginning of book 2, civil war rises up again from its unsettled grave with a Charybdis-like, almost biological inevitability: Sulla's victims were piled up and thrown into the Tiber, filling up its channel so completely that corpses were eventually thrown not into the river but on top of other bodies, causing ships to stick fast. Finally, the river of blood (after Achilles' Scamander in *Iliad* 12, and Virgil *Aen*.6.87, *Thybrim multo spumantem sanguine cerno*) finds a way to surge out (*vis sibi fecit iter, campumque effusa per omnem*, 2.215). Yet in the very next line we must imagine an opposing surge, across blood-logged fields and into the Tiber, which swells the current again, until the banks cannot contain it (2.216-17). Lucan's *vis sibi fecit iter* (2.215) paraphrases Virgil's *fit via vi* at *Aeneid* 2.494, when the Greeks bursting *into* Priam's palace are compared to a foaming river flooding *outwards* when it bursts its banks and sweeps away farm animals in the surrounding fields. Virgil's powerful spatial paradox, which thrusts Achilles' (already horribly disfigured) Xanthus-bursting *aristeia* into the intimate, heavily protected interiors of the Trojan city, is revived and rendered more elusive.[45] The resulting flood returned the corpses to land (*BC* 2.218), yet unlike in *Iliad* 21.238-9, the men are already dead when they are thrown into the water, and no survivors are kept safe in the bosom of the river.[46] These were the deeds, Lucan writes, that entitled Sulla to build a monumental tomb on the *other* Campus (*Campo*, 2.222, mirroring *campo* at the end of v.217), a space that was once marshland perversely reminiscent now of the (not quite) solidified river.

[45] See Rimell (2015) 55-6 on the Virgilian simile.
[46] See Fantham (1992) *ad loc*. on the 'metrical tour de force' of lines 216-20, culminating in an 'almost golden line'.

The compulsive iteration of civil war here suggests a fluid, post-Ovidian monumentality that returns us repeatedly to a morbid, circular process of saturation, overflow, burial, bursting. Straits, even more than rivers, offer the necessary depth and distendability to envisage the scale of this war's capacity to 'fill up' and 'glut' (to the point of debilitating sickness) even the greediest of imperialist, Hannibalic bellies (cf.1.38-9).

After Domitius' failed attempt to block Caesar's progress by sinking a bridge over the river near Cofinium (not even the Ganges could stop him, not once he had crossed the Rubicon, 2.496-8), Pompey 'surrenders' Italy to his stronger rival. He seeks retreat in the fortress of Brindisium on the edge of Italy's heel, the point at which the country grows 'narrow' (*angustum,* 2.613) and puts out an isthmus-like 'slender tongue' of land enclosing the Adriatic within 'narrowing jaws' (2.616). Shadowing Achilles and unwilling to allow his enemy any control over land or sea, Caesar blocks the harbour at Brindisium by casting masonry and rocks into the wide water (2.662). It is an ineffectual gigantomachy, for the Adriatic greedily swallows up all that it is fed, and digests the rocks by mingling them with its sands (2.663-4).[47] In response, Caesar has his men craft an immense wooden raft which creates a 'road' or 'land' over the sea, allowing his access but preventing ships from exiting the harbour, just as Xerxes built the two pontoon bridges over the Hellespont:

> tales fama canit tumidum super aequora Persen
> construxisse vias, multum cum pontibus ausus
> Europamque Asiam Sestonque admovit Abydo
> incessitque fretum rapidi super Hellesponti
>
> *BC*.2.672-5

> Such, by the report of fame, was the road built over the sea by the proud Persian, when, greatly daring, he brought Europe near to Asia and Sestos to Abydos by his bridges, and passed on foot over the straits of fast-flowing Hellespont.

[47] Cf. Hor.*Odes*.3.1.33-4, with Nisbet and Rudd (2004) *ad loc*., and Virg.*Aen*.9.710-14.

Sneaking away at night like Aeneas from Carthage in *Aeneid* 4,[48] Pompey escapes by the slimmest channel, an *angustus limes* already evoked in the earlier Hellespont simile, and now 'even narrower' than the Euripus, the treacherous strait between Attica and Euboea (2.709-10). Yet in the process it is the ships which 'overspill' the narrow pathway: the 'bridge' they make, unlike Caesar's conversion of sea into land, but ironically resembling both Xerxes' and Darius I's bridges made of boats spanning the related straits of the Hellespont and Bosporus, curtails rather than expands Pompey's powers.[49] Two vessels run aground, and the fighting moves to the shore, where the sea is first baptised with the blood of civil war – a delayed and delaying epic ignition in a scene which also resembles a premature denouement (already this epic has zoomed into the scene of the two protagonists in close combat, and the final word of book 2, *Magni*, will be echoed in the last word of the text as we have it, at 10.546, *Magnum*).[50] The fleet loses its ships to the rear, bitten off by Caesar's forces just as the first ship, the Argo, lost her stern when she passed through the Symplegades at the mouth of the Bosporus, the Hellespont's twin at the other end of the sea of Marmara (2.715-18).

Already at its launch-point, the *Bellum Civile* has staged its 'final' or determining duel, at a geopoetic node bulging with antiquity's three most famous straits (and their silt of narratives), two of which are key borders between Europe and Asia, and culminating in the narrowest, jaw-like point of the Bosporus where all space to maneouver is momentarily snapped shut. At Italy's isthmus-like heel, the world's key liquid frontiers run into one compressed site, and Caesarian empire annuls distance as it hems Pompey in.[51] The scenario will be relived in book 6, when Caesar succeeds in enclosing the Pompeian camps near Dyrrachium on the West coast of Greece, a huge net covering 'a space as big as that surrounded by the Tigris or swift Orontes' (6.51-2). The task is equivalent to 'joining Sestos to Abydos' by piling up earth so as to *elidere* (crush, compress, choke, remove, force out, destroy[52]) the Hellespont (6.55-6), or to tearing Corinth loose from the Peloponnese (6.57-8), another evocation of Caesar's *failed* mission, currently being imitated by Nero, to

[48] See Fantham (1992) *ad loc*., and Rossi (2000), who recognizes that Pompey's journey in the *BC* reverses that of Aeneas after Troy's fall.
[49] Cf. Caesar at *BC* 10.537. On the bridging of the Bosporus see Polybius *Hist*.4.39.16.
[50] On the final scene, see Rimell (2015), 240-52.
[51] Cf. Nicolet (1991, 2) on empire's bid to overcome the obstacle of distance. Cf. Rimell (2012) on this phenomenon in Seneca's *Medea.*
[52] See OLD sv. *elido.*

slice through the Isthmus of Corinth. Book 2's snapshot of the lost isthmus that once joined Sicily to the Italian mainland is flashed up again in the lines that follow, as the previous scene at Italy's heel is shrunk now into her toe (Pompey is like someone who lives in the centre of Sicily, unaware of Scylla's dogs barking in the straits of Messina, 6.65-6). The Pompeians are cornered (*coit area belli*, 6.60) by Caesar's globe-embracing expansion, yet Lucan's poetic maps ensure that such hyberbolic appropriations of space are already curbed: the Isthmus of Corinth is an insurmountable obstacle, just as the Hellespont can never literally be filled with earth.

The outflow from this conflux of straits enjoys an even greater surge at the beginning of book 4, when congestion on a cosmic scale is introduced by the most attenuated of threads linking this episode with earlier mentions of the Hellespont's depths. The first stage of Caesar's campaign is governed by an indomitable nature: a bitter, constricting Winter gives way to an apocalyptic Spring thaw when Aries, who (in the shape of the golden fleece) carried Helle across the strait and let her fall to her death, 'received the hot sun' (4.56). The memory of Helle's fall into the Hellespont's turbulent waters marks the point at which moisture from the world's great rivers in the East, North and South is sucked up and rolled into dense masses (*densos…globos*, 4.73-4) in the West, so that the space that divides earth from heaven can barely contain the 'clot of black mist' (*congestum aeris atri*, 4.74-5). After further condensing into rain, the clouds release their load, snows melt, and Caesar's army in Spain is violently flooded in a post-Virgilian-Ovidian storm, 'shipwrecked' and left swimming on land.[53] As the world is turned upside down, the overspilling, deadly Hellespont appears to crash down from the sky after Helle's 'fall' (*delapsae…Helles,* 57), swallowing and reconfiguring chthonic, cosmic, global *spatium*. Whereas Roman epic geography has always visualized the world's great rivers as symbolically conjoined, in this disaster all rivers lose their fixed path (*non habet una vias*, 4.86) and are literally consumed by a huge whirlpool (*vastaque voragine,* 4.99).

Just as Caesar fails in book 2 to squash Pompey in these infinitely fillable waters and to impose on him the master-frontier of the Hellespont-Bosporus, so Caesar's eventual triumph at Ilerda and control of its surrounding rivers in book 4[54] is followed by Curio's defeat in Africa. Likewise, in the wake of book 7, Caesar's

[53] See Masters (1992) 58-65 on the extent to which Lucan's 'universal deluge' is modelled on the flood in Ovid.*Met.*1 and the storm in Virg.*Aen*.1. See Lapidge (1979) on the flood as Stoic ecpyrosis.
[54] On which see Masters (1992) 65-70.

'victory' in civil war will ultimately block imperial expansion, or more precisely upset the delicate tension between empire's will to expand and the necessity for it to see itself through miniaturizing maps and microcosms. In book 2, we see telegraphically how the impulse to map triggers an agonizing contraction that enacts - even causes - empire's relative 'smallness' and limitation in the wake of civil war in the second half of the poem. In book 4, when Caesar's own troops are overwhelmed by a paranormal Hellespontine deluge, nature mirrors the general's one-world densification by shrinking East, North and South into a precision-impact *Western* storm system, in contrast to Jupiter's and Neptune's global flood (Ovid *Met*.1.283-312). Caesar of course survives this localized event (unlike in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in a world infected by civil war there is no moral high ground, no equivalent of Deucalion and Pyrrha), yet the suggestive image of Helle's drowning in the strait that historically cut Europe off from Asia might also be read as an omen that such symbolic boundaries (or literal ones, in the case of the Isthmus of Corinth) will continue to stymie this conqueror's ambition and prevent future Rome from achieving total command of Asia.

When in the wake of the battle at Pharsalia Caesar retraces Pompey's steps and sails down the Hellespont to visit Troy, Lucan writes: 'nowhere does a smaller stretch of water sever Asia from Europe' (9.957-8), although, he adds, the other two Black Sea bottlenecks are also very narrow (9.958-960). Such intimidating boundaries no longer represent a challenge to Caesar, if they ever did, and Troy's once overflowing river of blood is but a stream snaking through the dust, crossed almost without thinking (9.974-5). As critics have pointed out, this passage seems to underscore how straightforward transgression has become for Caesar.[55] Yet Troy, so close to the Hellespont's banks, is ultimately the furthest Caesar will progress into Asia in a poem which carves the world into Europe-Africa and (a much larger, still mysterious) Asia. Lucan's maps suggest that despite the ease with which it is now navigated and traversed, in symbolic terms the Hellespont remains a significant border between West and (unconquered) East, a depository for engulfing imperial desire and fear of failure; moreover, that it is destined to overlap poetically with the monstrous straits of Messina, and with the impenetrable Isthmus that links Caesar's exploits with ongoing Neronian struggles against nature's epic architecture. The

[55] Ormand (1994) 52, Bexley (2014) 391. Cf. also (2005) on Caesar's 'tourist trip' to Troy.

'sheer bulk' which Jamie Masters recognizes as Lucan's core 'anti-Callimachean' weaponry in the *Bellum Civile* finds its most effective vehicle and elastic frame in Helle's strait and its related waterways. Yet while Catullus and Ovid – in the passages we have read - are already engaged in testing the paradoxes of imperial Callimacheanism via the trope of the Hellespont, in Lucan's epic, as in Statius' *Achilleid*, those stagnant Callimachean oppositions between expansion and contraction, massive churning river and pure font, are features of a geopoetics now rendered inadequate, non-sensical. These insatiable waterways, whose three dimensions can never reliably be mapped, generate art that defies the usual instruments of measure, so that all that is *angustus* can gulp down the world, over-trafficked rivers can create revolutionary new routes or even a landscape without paths, and *tenuitas* can be faked or perverted by neoteric poets and imperialists alike.[56]

V.

In conclusion, I want to turn finally - and all too briefly - to a poem I have already mentioned in passing (Statius, *Silvae* 4.3), whose use of the Hellespont-Isthmus pairing in the context of imagining absolute imperial command over space can fully be appreciated only once we have scanned Catullus', Ovid's and Lucan's maps in detail. Statius' long, thin homage in hendecasyllables to the Via Domitiana, Domitian's brand new superhighway set to reduce the travel time from Rome to Naples from a day to two hours (36-7) is a clanging, high speed celebration of the filling in and draining of waterlogged, almost sea-like land (*horrebat mala navigationis* 31).[57] The venture owes everything to (burying) the clogged, bridged, packed Xanthus-Hellespont, with all that these *viae* now contain – an encyclopedia of conflicts between Europe and Asia, including the Trojan war, but also layer upon layer of Roman civil strife, Caesarian-Neronian imperialist rampaging and penetration, plus the history of failure to pierce tongues of land and 'fill' grooves brimming with raging, anxious, abandoned, raped and irresistible women. The poem's first verb is *replevit* (3), and the detailed description of the road's construction makes

[56] See e.g. Caesar's army at *BC* 4.130-6, travelling over the swollen river Sicoris in tiny boats made of papyrus, with Masters (1992) 69.

[57] Draining marshy land (e.g. the Pontine marshes) was of course an ongoing, politically loaded battle throughout Roman history (Rome itself began as a wet valley wilderness on the banks of the Tiber). See esp. Purcell (1996).

emphatic the *filling in* (*haustos…replere fossas,* 43) that will stamp out all doubt and treachery (44-6), harden the land and straighten out its undular windings (22), in keeping with Domitian's outlawing of debilitated masculinity (13-15: these lines might also read as a demonization of Statius' feminized Achilles). Momentarily, Statius makes explicit the affront of hole-as-woman, and woman-as-hole, the extent to which male identity and therefore imperial power are enacted in the possession and filling in of this (otherwise) polluting and feminizing void.[58] Yet officially there shall be no dwelling, now, on body-piling great male warrior Achilles, on Xanthus-Hellespont slowed by a different kind of human activity. This packed, solidified road will ensure purified rivers (Volturnus, at 86-94) and futuristic speed – at last a man-made path more rapid than the proverbial Hellespont! (39). When the road-gangs strip mountainsides of trees, either to provide wood for the road's construction or to clear a path (50), and the shores throb with activity (*fervent litora*, 61), there shall be no contagion with scenes of incipient Trojan war in the *Achilleid* (*fervent …litora Ach*.1.28-9), a text already bulging at the seams with Lucanian overloading and rupture; no intimation, either, of Domitian as Caesar (or as Rome-swallowing Nero) 'invading' the Italian landscape when he should have been pushing empire outwards. At lines 55-60, Domitian is all set to trump Xerxes, Caesar, Caligula and Nero, who were only adept at *bridging* the Hellespont, or who only *metaphorically* filled in the strait (e.g. at Lucan 6.51-2), and who famously failed to dig a channel through the Isthmus of Corinth. Yet the inevitably inferred hubris will be tightly bordered and weighted down by regimenting, properly monumentalizing stones:

> hae possent et Athon cavare dextrae
> et maestum pelagus gementis Helles
> intercludere ponte non natanti.
> his parvus, nisi †diviae† vetarent,
> Inous freta miscuisset Isthmos.
>
> *Silv*.4.3.55-60

[58] As many feminist commentators have observed, this 'affront' fuels the extreme, 'pre-emptive' violence of much of modern hard-core pornography, in which the plugging of every dirty female hole is even accorded its own generic label ('airtight'). Cf. Dworkin (1981, e.g. 55), Whisnant (2008).

> These hands could tunnel through Athos and shut off moaning Helle's sad sea with a bride that did not float. Ino's Isthmus, a trifle for these labourers, would have mingled the waters if…did not forbid it.

As the hendecasyllabic drumming whips chariots into a frenzy of speed, faster and faster (*velocior*, 104), ever shriller, more excited, acrid, violent, wild (*acrior*, 104), Domitianic dromocracy is granted an unlikely mascot.[59] The enigmatic ancient Sibyl, presiding goddess of Cumae's bubbling volcanic depths, her of the hundred mouths, the labyrinthine windings, the riddling, deranged writings, Virgil's (and Ovid's) 'most mysterious speaker'[60], who begins her prophecy in *Aeneid* with a horrific vision of the Tiber foaming with blood (*Aen*.6.87), comes dancing onto stage near the project's end and 'fills up' the road in her Bacchic frenzy (*novisque late / bacchatur spatiis viamque replet*, 121-2). Coleman comments: 'The Sibyl in her ravings takes up the entire width of the road',[61] yet *filling* (after the precision diagram of v.43, not to mention the repressed memories of Lucan's Caesar hurling rubble into straits) now infers a bottom-up, three-dimensional saturation to challenge Domitian's top-down compression. Let loose, her movement erratic and circular, her neck dislocating (she overwrites/channels Lucan's prophetess, careering about her cave and bursting with bad news),[62] the Sibyl competes with Domitian's solid, geometric, teleologic symbology and embodies precisely the threat to imperial, masculine identity that highway-building seeks to quash, once and for all.[63] The thrill of road speed (*nec velocius*, 39) has mutated into all-knowing, unknowable (even comic?) head-spin (*en! et colla rotat* 121), as slender imperial panegyric whips itself into a riddle of excess, boasting conquests of the East that are unmatched by reality (153-4: in fact, Domitian ranged no further than Germany[64]).

When Sibyl speaks her eulogy of Domitian's projected *imperium sine fine* 'with a virgin mouth' (she should orate in hexameters, not these strange, screeching hendecasyllables), the notion that she is 'un-Callimachean in her expansiveness', as

[59] On Virilio's concepts of dromology and dromocracy, see Virilio (1986).
[60] Gowers (2005) 171.
[61] Coleman (1988) *ad loc.*
[62] *BC* 5.169-70 (*bacchatur demens aliena per antrum / colla ferens*), cf. *BC* 1.566.
[63] Never far away is crazy Dido's threat to Aeneas' mission and the future of Rome (*totumque incensa per urbem / bacchatur*, *Aen.*4.300-1).
[64] See Jones (1992, 126-59) on Domitian's policy, which was mostly defensive and rejected the idea of expansionist warfare.

Newlands puts it, is emptied of meaning.[65] As it gets to grips with and reshapes empire in the second half of the first century, Roman poetry smashes apart the spatial metaphors that underpin its evolution, and throws itself into the deep. Time-space compression, a reconfigured expansion that moves not outwards but downwards into unpredictable, liquid space, generates a very different set of aesthetic possibilities for Latin literature, and provokes urgent questions about how Rome might re-found itself in the light of its own confinement.

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